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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: ANTONINI-WILSON CLAIMS NESTOR KIRCHNER  
"KNEW EVERYTHING" BUT GOA STAYS MUM

REF: BUENOS AIRES 1522 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) Summary and introduction: Argentine daily "La Nacion" prominently published November 9 a lengthy exclusive interview with dual U.S.-Venezuelan citizen Guido Antonini-Wilson (A-W), who was intercepted by GOA authorities in August 2007 with a suitcase stuffed with \$800,000 arriving on a chartered flight from Caracas. Although much of the interview rehashed what A-W has said in court in Miami and on CNN, the interview contained a few newsworthy nuggets, including A-W's claim that then-GOA official Claudio Uberti had told him that "Nestor Kirchner (NK) knew everything" about the incident and that NK said "they were going to back me up all the way." A-W also claimed that at the airport he was not allowed to declare that the suitcase belonged to Uberti; that he signed under duress a statement admitting the suitcase was his; that Uberti offered to get him a lucrative GOA beef export license in exchange for his cooperation; and that a cohort paid airport police officer Maria Lujan Telpuk a \$5,000 bribe. A-W also repeated previous claims, including that the money in the suitcase came from Venezuelan oil parastatal PDVSA and was destined for the presidential campaign of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK); that he attended a meeting at the Casa Rosada; that he received other assurances from Uberti; that he was pressured to cooperate and feared reprisal; and that he overheard discussion of another \$4.2 million on the flight. The Argentine opposition, led in this instance by Civic Coalition head Elisa Carrio, seized the opportunity to denounce Kirchner's direction of illegal activities and announced plans to present a criminal complaint in hopes of requiring Kirchner to testify in court. The GOA has not responded to the A-W interview, but the Argentine magistrate investigating criminal charges against A-W formally asked the Ministry of Justice to report on the status of Argentina's request for the extradition of A-W from the United States. He also asked the MOH the status of his request for access to evidence obtained by the U.S. judicial system. We wonder if the time has come when the suitcase saga finally fades away. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Argentine daily newspaper of record "La Nacion" carried in its Sunday edition, November 9, a lengthy "exclusive" interview, starting on page one, with dual U.S.-Venezuelan citizen Guido Antonini-Wilson (A-W), who was intercepted by GOA authorities in August 2007 with a suitcase stuffed with \$800,000 arriving on a chartered flight from Caracas. A-W fled to the United States in August 2007, and the GOA has a request pending for his extradition. Most recently he was a key witness in the Miami trial and conviction of Franklin Duran for acting as an unregistered agent of the Venezuelan government. La Nacion's interview with A-W took place in Fort Lauderdale.

¶3. (SBU) Although much of the interview rehashed what A-W has

said in court in Miami and on CNN, there were some newsworthy nuggets, including A-W's claim that then-GOA official Claudio Uberti had told him that "Nestor Kirchner (NK) knew everything" about the incident and that NK said "they were going to back me up all the way." A-W said Uberti had told him, the day after the airport interception, that Kirchner had asked him about A-W. According to A-W, Kirchner was told of A-W's stance at the airport, Kirchner allegedly said to Uberti, "That man is a stud, and since that man backed us up, we will back him up all the way." A-W said he got the impression that Uberti told him this "to make me feel party to the crime." He also claimed that Uberti offered to get him a lucrative GOA beef export license in exchange for his cooperation.

14. (SBU) In the interview, A-W also claimed that at the airport he was not allowed to declare that the suitcase belonged to Uberti. He said he told several GOA officials at the airport that the money was not his, and that he specifically told Argentine Customs officials Jorge Lamastra and Maria Cristina Gallini that the money belonged to Uberti. A-W said that, at the insistence of the GOA officials, he signed a statement admitting the suitcase was his. Otherwise, he would not have been able to leave the airport.

15. (SBU) A new detail (for us) was A-W's assertion that a cohort (the 19-year-old son of PDVSA executive Diego Uzcategui) paid two airport police officers, including Maria Lujan Telpuk, a \$5,000 bribe. (Telpuk later testified in the Miami trial of Franklin Duran as a defense witness.) A-W also repeated previous claims, including that the money in the suitcase came from Venezuelan oil parastatal PDVSA and was destined for the presidential campaign of Cristina

Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK), that he attended an event at the Casa Rosada presidential palace, that he received other assurances from Uberti, that he was pressured to cooperate and feared reprisal, and that he overheard discussion of another \$4.2 million on the flight.

16. (SBU) In a follow-up story on November 10, "La Nacion" reported that opposition Civic Coalition leader Elisa Carrio was planning to file a criminal complaint against Nestor Kirchner for racketeering. A closer reading of the article indicates, however, that Carrio's complaint is based primarily on Kirchner's alleged plan to abscond with private retirement plans (AFJPs) currently being confiscated by the GOA, and only indirectly or secondarily for his alleged involvement with the \$800,000 suitcase. Carrio said she would ask the court to summon Kirchner for a deposition. Other opposition leaders also seized the opportunity to denounce Kirchner and call on the courts to investigate his alleged involvement in illegal activities. Opposition deputies Carlos Raimundi and Eduardo Macaluse noted they had doubts about A-W's credibility but thought the GOA still owed some explanations.

17. (SBU) The GOA has not responded to the A-W interview, maintaining a reserved silence. This stands in sharp contrast to previous instances such as November 5, when Justice Minister Anibal Fernandez called A-W a "good-for-nothing" who had been paid for his testimony. However, "La Nacion" reported November 11 that Judge Daniel Petrone, the Argentine magistrate investigating money laundering and contraband charges against A-W, had sent a formal note asking the Ministry of Justice to report on the status of Argentina's request for the extradition of A-W from the United States. "La Nacion" noted the extradition request was over one year old, and that the Argentine courts had received no response. Petrone also asked the MOJ about his request for access to evidence obtained by the U.S. judicial system. "La Nacion" said Petrone was waiting for authorization to travel to the United States to gather evidence and interview the "protagonists in the trial of the Venezuelan (Franklin Duran) who, according to the Miami courts, tried to silence Antonini." Other media outlets reported that Argentine Ambassador Hector Timerman had "again" appealed to the State Department for A-W's

extradition.

Comment

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18. (SBU) There was little new information in the A-W interview and related articles, and A-W did little to bolster his credibility with his defensive and self-serving recollection of events, but La Nacion's headlines ("Kirchner knew everything" and "he said they were going to back me all the way") were provocative enough to make us wonder if there would be some harsh GOA reaction. Publicly, there has been none, but we may yet pay a price in private. (Two days before the A-W interview was published, a high GOA official told the CDA that he could still offer no new date for bilateral consultations that had been canceled because "they" -- the Kirchners -- were still unhappy with what had come out of the Miami trial.) Judging from the general reaction to the "La Nacion" interview, we wonder whether the suitcase saga may be nearing the end of its life cycle, as it seems to fade from the Argentine public's already-fatigued consciousness, and the opposition will be hard-pressed to elicit a judicial investigation by the easily intimidated or coopted federal court system.

KELLY